Kashmir Śaivism and Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism:

A Comparative Study With special Reference to Tantric Philosophy of *Śaktivāda*

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There's a popular saying borrowed from a contemporary Hollywood film "When it is real you can't walk away''. This simple but utterly 'real' words invoke us to dig down our understating of 'reality' because we can't ignore it. From here I would like to start our voyage exploring two known philosophical systems; *Kashmir Śaivism* (*Pratyavijñā darśana*) and *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism*, those have represent a perfect amalgamation of theory and practice on this very note 'if it is real we can't just walk away'. *Tantraśastra* adheres that **life** is the Ultimate Truth that oscillates between refusal and enjoyment, who wants to cross these samsara must transcend this binary opposition relishing both ends.

Broadly speaking the tantric tradition is branched as *śaiva, śakta, vaiṣṇva, sauriya, gāṇapatya*, (some authentic sources include Buddhist and Jain tantric cult instead of *saurya* and *gāṇapatya school*). The word 'Tantra' is etymologically derived from cloths (that which is made of *tantu* or thread) that broadly signifies the act of weaving both knowledge and practice together; beautifully written by Sant Kabir '*chadaria jhini re jhini*' (weaving the cloths by thread of knowledge and practice). '*Tantra'* significantly also means that practice which cures the body. Thus '*practice'* or '*sādhana'* remains the point of focus in Tantra (as well as in the Vedas) this is where we must fix our understanding to explore the philosophy of the '*Śakti'*. 'Practice' or *Sādhana* makes one understand the play of '*energy'* or '*power'* or '*śakti'* within one's body as well as in this cosmos. In this sense, '*power'* or '*energy'* is not enough as science explains it only in its physico-material terms and conditions. *Śakti* is realized as ever-conscious or *caitanyamayi*. The word '*śakti'* is derived from the root word '*śak'* that means able to do or the capacity of doing, which constitutes as the power to know, to wish, to act (*jñanaśakti, ichhāśakti, kriyāśakti*) and there is an use of feminine suffix '*ktin'* . Though '*Śakti'* as a *tatva* (that what is real) is devoid of gender but as it is explained Tantra, '*striśabdena tathāpi kalpaballivat yujyate*' that means as the wishfulfilling creeping-plant (*latā)* is not plant at all

but imagined as a plant. Like that '*śakti'* is worshipped and addressed as *devi* or the ultimate mother nature of everything.

The Tantric system of thought has put forward their philosophy that everything is Conscious and the world is nothing but a divine play of Consciousness with its(/his) '*Power'* that is the reason they have seen the truth where *Śakti-Śaktimān* shares *abinābhava sambandha*; not-dissimilar-from-each-other-relationship. *Vṛhādaraṇyakopaniṣad* confirms when the Ultimate Consciousness felt his loneliness he becomes two; *'tasmādidamardhabṛgalamiva'(1/4/3).*

The post Vedic literature and philosophy gave birth to different schools of thought. Those philosophical schools have been nourished and flourished through their commentaries and argumentation mainly based on three terminals of the Vedas, namely the *Brahmasūtra*, the *Upaniṣads*, the *Bhāgavatgīta*. Though the *Sāmkhya-Yoga* and *Nyaya-Vaiśeṣika* schools have given the utter importance to the words of the Vedas, yet they have philosophized their own structure of thought to attain emancipation. But the *Mimānsa* (*pūrvamimānsā*) and the Vedanta (*uttaramimānsā*) schools have solely developed their systems on the analysis of the words of the Vedas. The questions on which different schools have offered their answers and have shown their point of departure are-

1. What is the relationship between the Ultimate Reality and the individuals (*jīvas*)?
2. What is the relationship between the Ultimate Reality and the world?
3. What is the relationship between the individuals and the world?

Philosophical systems as '*Advaitavādins'* or the monist schools have advocated that the individuals are one with Brahman and the world is just a mere appearance, The '*Dvaitavādins'* or the dualist schools have seen the relationship where *bheda* or difference is accepted between the Supreme and the world, the Supreme and the individuals, among the individuals and among the worldly insentient beings. There are also other '*Dvaitādvaitavādins'* and *Bhedābhedavādins* among the Vedanta schools those have established their system of philosophy in terms of both difference and non-difference between the Ultimate Reality and the individuals. An unproclaimed hierarchy is found among the phenomenological schools of Indian Philosophy, grouped under the *uttara-mimāsaka* schools, to write commentary on *Upaniṣad*, *Gīta* and *Brahmasūṭra*, for their own recognition as *Vedantic* schools, while the

agamic tradition have evolved and authenticated their traditional philosophy in their own way. Though the commentary of *Śaktadvaitavāda* or *Śaivadvaitavāda* have been found on *brahmasūtra*, but philosophers like *Avinavgupta* or *Śrijīva Gosvami* are appreciated for their own unique contribution to their system of thought and the argumentative discourse of Indian Philosophy so far. However, the *Tantraśastra* never unjustified the Vedic words and wisdom. In this project we are going to explore such unique, individualistic and scholastic philosophical systems with their comparative aspects; the *Kashmir Śaivism* and the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism*. It is worth to mention that the Tantric tradition carries its glory through *Śaivism, Vaiṣṇvism, Buddhism and Jainism (later developments)* in a great milieu.

The *Śaiva* cult is divided into various philosophical schools like *Spandavada, Trikśastra, Saraddhaśastra, Śivādvaitavāsa, Ābhāsavāda* where *Kashmir Śaivism* is authentically known as *Pratyavijña darśan*. *Śiva* with his *Śakti* are the one and same *Reality* (*Sat* or *Tatva)*. In expression (*abhivyakti*), in total, it brings into being the thirty-six following '*tattvas*' (same as the philosophy of creation by the *Samkhyas*). By denotation, *Śiva* and *Śakti*, or *Jñana* and *Kriya*, or *Prakaṣa* and *Vimarsa* are same but just two connotations. It means that *Śiva* or the Consciousness, when intrinsically functioning as dynamic creativity, the very dynamism of *Siva* is; *Sakti*. So the creativity is the very essence of divinity. That's why *Paraśiva* has two aspects namely the transcendental and the creative.

1. This creative aspect of *paraśiva* is known as *śivatattva* which is the initial creative movement or *prathama spanda* of *Paraśiva*.
2. *Śakti tattva* is the energy or *spanda* of *Śiva*, she polarized consciousness into *Aham* and *idam*, or as the subject and object.
3. *Sadaśiva* or *tattva* which the 'will' or *Ichha-śakti* comes to play to make 'this' or *idam* as an '*asphuta*' (hazy) experience, when the 'I' is still predominant.
4. The next stage of the divine experience is that where *Idam* or '*this*' side of the total experience becomes more defined which is *Īsvara tattva*. Here, predominating śakti is *jñāna*. Thus, when the experience of *Sadāśiva* is 'I am this', the experience of *Īsvara* is 'this am I'

5. In the stage of *Sadvidyā tattva* expands; the experience can be called as diversity-in-unity, where 'I' and 'this' are distinctly separated but still be felt as a part of consciousness. The self feels "what is 'I' is 'this', and what is 'This' is 'I'.

6. *Śakti* as *kriya* is predominant at this stage as this is called *parāpara dasa.* Then comes *māyā* in the order of creation, and from this stage onwards there follows impure order in which the higher ideal nature (*svarūpa*) of the divine is veiled. *Māyā* is addressed as '*apara' śakti;* a veil over consciousness. The word *māyā* is derived from the root '*ma*' meaning 'to measure', and that which makes experience measurable is *māyā*, i.e limited and distinctly polarized 'I and this' and 'this and I'.

7. *Māyā* generates the five sheaths of limitation, *panca kancukas*, which bounds the universal consciousness and make It limited *purūṣa* (the individual or *paśu*, or *anu*, the limited embodied soul). Thus the all-pervading consciousness adopts the limitations and differentiates itself from others and this very differentiation is possible because consciousness is limited to particular empirical-individual or *jiva-s*. The five sheaths are ***Vidya, Kāla, Raga, Niyati, and Kala***.

This is the theory of evolution where the function of *Śakti* is well understood, that is mostly common in the schools of thought in *Pratyavijñā darśana.*

Let us explore the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* Philosophy in contrast**.** The *Vaiṣṇava* philosophical tradition, mainly follows from *Pāncarātra Samhita*, has been enhanced through *Śri*, *Brahma*, *Rudra* and *Kumāra* schools of thought, where the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* philosophy follows *Brahmasampradāya* or *Madhvacharya* tradition. Hence *Mahāprabhu Śri Chaitanya* is always admired and worshipped for his uniqueness to propound the *acintyābhedābheda* philosophy through the message of infinite love. The *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* tradition has given all importance to *Kṛṣṇa-Śakti Tattva* too, but uniquely has stated the *Rādhātattvā* as the prime. In *Caitanya Caṛitamrta* it is stated–

saccidānanda haya isvārasvarupa/ tin angse citsakti hay tinarupa/ anandaṇse hladini, sadanse sandhinī/ cidamśe samvit yare krsnajnana mani//antarangā citsakti, tatastha jivasakti/ bahiranga maya tine kare premabhakti//

(Caitanya Caritamṛta, Madhya: 6/158-160)

The verse states clearly that *Lord Kṛṣṇa* has three energetic transformations. Those are three *vibhābas* (*viśeṣa bhāvas*), namely *citśakti*, *jivāśakti (tathasthā)* and *māyāśakti*, three *prabhābavas* (*prakṛṣta bhāvas*) *ichāśakti*, *kṛyaśakti*, and *jňānaśakti* and three *anubhābas*(one with the reality), namely *sandhinī, samvit and hlādini*. In this paragraph we will only talk about the *parāśakti* or *Svarūpa Śakti*. The *Gauḍīya* School has admitted *Kṛṣṇa* is *saccidānanda-*

bigraha that means *sattvā*, *citvattvā* and *ānadattva* are not external *guṇas* or attributes of *Kṛṣṇa,* rather those are *svarūpaśakti* of *Śri Bhagavan*, because qualities (*guṇas*) necessarily share the *samavāya* relationship with the substance (*dravya*); which does not hold between the Ultimate Reality; *Kṛṣṇa* with his energies or *śakti*. Here lies the beauty of the philosophy of *acintyabhedābheda* or inconceivable identity-in-difference; which reveals the actual identity remains when the Reality does not aware of his existence, consciousness and bliss; but when He starts relishing himself the difference occur between him and his energies;

- It is by *Sandhinī* of His *svarupa śakti* (intrinsic power) that he upholds all existence including Himself.
- The function of *Samvit*, consists in enabling Him to know and make other know.
- While *Hlādinī* enables to enjoy the bliss and make others enjoy the same.

Among all other aspects of Śakti, this school has given the importance to *Hlādinī Śakti*, named as *Rādhāthakurani* who is infinite and dynamic, and it is mirrored in His *Hlādinī Śakti*, Brahman is regarded as the ultimate reality in its most perfect form and worshiped as *Śrī Bhagavān* by the devotees. The great and blessed poet of Bengal, *Śrila Jayadeva* wrote in his magnum opus devotional poetry about the *bhagavatlīla*, i.e. *Gitagovinda,* where *Śri Kṛṣṇa* wants to console *Rādhārāni's anger* (*māna*), He (the supreme) begs out of ultimate love '*dehi pada pallavamudaram'*, i.e 'oh! *Rādhā*, give me your Lotus feet'. That explains the highest philosophical appreciation of the *Śakti,* where *Śaktimāna* is bowed to his *Śakti* for everything.

This comparative study will focus on the systems of philosophy spatially with their understanding of *Śaktitatva* which will broadly offer a comparative study between their epistemological systems as well as their metaphysical expositions. But the study would be incomplete without showing the contrast and controversies with the *Advaitavādins* regarding the thesis of '*Śakti'*, because both the schools have offered strong argumentative dialogue with the *Advaitavādins*, noticeably *Śaṇkārācarya's advaitavāda* as the main opponent. The *Advaitavādins* have established that, anything second to Brahman; the Ultimate Reality, is not transcendentally real (*pāramārthika sat*). Thus the *Advaitavādins* confined the whole philosophical discourse establishing that the *individuals* are essentially one with the *Ultimate Consciousness* but unknown of their essence due to ignorance *(ajñāna).* The world appearance is neither true nor false for the *Advaitavādins* therefore the beauty of worshipping and relishing

the divine play (*līlā*) of the Ultimate Consciousness is completely omitted and ignored in this philosophical system that basically goes against the *Tantra*, perhaps the for the *Vedas* too. Thus the discussion will address the criticism for the *Advaitavāda* from both the systems.

The comparative studies between *Kashmir Śaivism* and the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism* will be centred upon such conflicting issues-

1. ***What is the relationship between the Ultimate Reality (Śiva or Kṛṣṇa) with Śakti?***
2. ***What is the relationship between the Ultimate Reality and the individuals (jīvas)?***
3. ***What is the relationship between Śakti and the individuals (jīvas)***

Out of till date of my research, a very subtle contrasting perspective between these two have been observed and yet to be investigated. *Śaivagama* and *Vaiṣṇavāgama* both have accepted the identity relationship between *Śakti* and *Śaktimān* as the rest of *Tantraśastra*. But the point of emphasis of both are quite contrasting. The *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* tradition follows *Viṣṇupūrana*, that confirms –

viṣṇuśaktiḥ para prokta kṣetrajñasya tathaparā/ avidya karmasajñanya tṛtīyā śaktiricyate//

The energies are of three sorts, the divine energy which is the highest, and called the Viṣṇu Śakti, the jīva-energy which is lower than this and called the kṣetrajñā śakti, and third the material energy called avidyā or karma-energy.

With the impact of *Madhva* dualist tradition, the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* philosophy has focussed on both identity and difference between *Śakti* and *Śaktimān* in terms of 'inconceivability' or '*acintya'* (beyond speculation), where *aparā* or *māyā* śakti get inactivated in the time of destruction but the divine play between *svarupaśakti* and *Kṛṣna* remains eternal and relished by the liberated soul or *tathasthā śakti*, which for them is the final liberation or *premabhaktivilāsa*.

The very philosophy of '*Pratyavijñā'* or self-recognition clearly conveys '*jīva is Śiva*'. Though the *Kashmir Śaivism* have not been named in terms of relationship (like *śaivadvaita-vāda or śaivaviśiṣtadvaitavāda*) but inherently follows what is uttered in ***Kūlarnava Tantra*** –

Advaitam kecidicchanti dvaitam icchanti cāpare /
*Mama tatvam na Jānanti dvaitādvaita vivarjitam //***1.110.**

“Some prefers Advaita (non-dualism), some other prefers *Dvaita* (dualism). But my true nature (or the nature of the Brahman), which is devoid of both *Dvaita* and Advaita (*Dvaitadvaita Vivarjitam*) is not known to either of them”.

This is so important to understand that the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* philosophy have accepted both difference and identity which is logically inconceivable, but the *Pratyāvijñā darśana* sees the truth neither in terms of difference nor in term of identity; the philosophy *Dvaitādvaitavivarjitam*. Our analytical mind here compels us to commemorate the *Nagarjuna’s* philosophy, which would be our future analysis.

A research hunch is also working behind this comparative study which is mostly historical but philosophically significant. As because the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* philosophy is originated in Bengal or the Gaudadeśa, the most significant place of Tantric Practice, we should look at the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiya tradition. Interestingly *Nityānḍaprabhu* (one of the major companion of *Mahāprabhu*) has practiced and taught the *śaivasadhanā* or *śaktisādhana*, which is significantly different from the practice (sanyasa) of *dashnami sampradaya.* (*Giri, Puri, Bharti, Ban, Aranya, Sagar, Aashram, Saraswati, Tirth, and Parvat).* It is important to know that *Mahaprabhu* was a disciple of *Madhabendra Puri*, but later taught and adopt the *Nityānanda* philosophy which rejuvenate both the *Śaiva* and the *Vaiṣṇava* tradition, and untold history yet to be unfold.

The whole research would wish to end on highlighting the beautiful amalgamation and contrast among the thoughts of many philosophical systems and practices in India.

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